Cogenerational Solutions to Social Isolation and Loneliness: A conversation with Jillian Racoosin

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

Welcome everyone. I'm Eunice Lin Nichols, I'm the Co-CEO of CoGenerate, a nonprofit focused on bridging divides and bringing generations together to co create a better world. Really excited that you're here today for this special conversation with Jillian Racoosin. And I will introduce her more in a second. But I wanted to officially welcome you to the kickoff for a exciting body of work that we're doing called CoGen Solutions to Social Isolation and Loneliness. It's a body of work that is so important because I think we all know that social isolation and loneliness has been of deep concern for our country for a long time really across the world. And coming out of the pandemic, we've felt, we've all had a direct touch point with what it feels like to feel socially isolated and alone, it's a really good moment and opportunity to focus on the opposite of that social connection and ways that we bring each other together in particular across generations. As all the research shows that older and younger generations are the most impacted by, by this challenge. So given that we believe that the most important and perhaps least known solution in terms of focus to social isolation, loneliness is when we bring older and younger generations together, not as victims but what we like to describe as agents of change. It's a topic that is near and dear to my heart, I felt deeply isolated and alone in high school when I didn't see many other people at school who look like me or felt like kindred spirits. And luckily, I have social connection outside of school through my faith community, and they kept me grounded. But if I hadn't had that, I don't know where I would be today. And I've noticed that other transitional moments in particular in my life, where community has been a little bit more unstable, or where I've entered into a new stage, those bouts of social isolation and loneliness have come back. That includes entering the working world out of college. It includes when I became a mother and had to re navigate life with young children. I will be approaching this soon as I become an empty nester in a few years. And obviously, the body of work my organization has done around purpose and retirement has caused us to see very clearly the ways in which isolation and loneliness can set in at that stage of life. So this work is personal. It's always personal. My guess is it's personal to all of you. And that's why I'm so excited to be hosting this conversation with Jillian Racoosin. Today, she's the Executive Director of The Foundation for Social Connection, and is really here to ground us in these issues. And to talk about why cogeneration needs to be part of every conversation about social isolation and loneliness. We're also excited to be kicking off a an upcoming community of practice focused on these topics. And I'll be telling you more about that at the end of this. So stay tuned for that. So I first met Jillian about two years ago, when she reached out to invite me to speak at the foundation for social connections annual Action Forum. It's an event that you should all pay attention to. It's focused on raising the visibility of the national and global crisis of social isolation and loneliness. And the event featured promising innovations. It promoted policy priorities, that centered human connection, and it put out a nationwide organizational call to action was very impressed by the content by the people that Julian invited to the table and those who showed up. And from that moment on, I have been just a fan girl of Jillian seeking out opportunities to connect and collaborate. And as I've gotten to know her better, I've been impressed by both her command for the growing body of hard hitting research around social isolation and loneliness. I've been moved by her commitment to taking that research and making it incredibly practical for both innovators who are trying to make new things happen in communities, as well as for community leaders, for whom this is more than just a concept. They're living with the fallout of isolation and loneliness in their communities and relationships every day. So I'm excited to be in conversation with Julian. And we'll invite you to put any questions you might have in the q&a box. And we'll also track the chat box. But if you put it in the q&a, it's a little easier for us. And we will have a chance to address any of your questions at the end. So thank you. Thank you, Jillian, for being here. I'm really pleased and honored to have you be here for the kickoff of our CoGen Solutions Initiative. I'm going to start with a question that allows you to do a more personal introduction of yourself. I think, because as we've discussed, these topics are personal. It feels like all conversations this one should feel really socially connected, and personal. So I know you have a background in public health. You've worked previously in healthcare technology and care management, but I suspect that your passion for these topics stem from earlier in life. So tell us a little bit about your path to where you are today and how it connects to your work at the foundation for social care. Question.

**Jillian Racoosin**

Oh, well, thank you so much Eunice, and thank you to the CoGenerate team for having me today. I was gonna say I am a fangirl right back at you, from the moment that you came and spoke, you know, at our Action Forum to, you know, our gathered gatherings in DC to walks in San Francisco that we had in March, just every time we get together, I'm so impressed by you and your work and the community and the network that you have brought together. So thank you so much for having me, really. And you're exactly right. You know, this is a personal issue to us all, we can all relate in some way to feelings of isolation of loneliness, especially after having gone through the pandemic, you know, together and over the last couple of years. And people's experiences might be different with that. But I really came to this work, as you said, my background in public health. I studied specifically socio socio medical sciences. So I've always been interested in kind of the, the relationship in the interactions between our social health and, and our physical and medical health. And I was really interested specifically in health promotion, and how do we help people behave in healthy ways that help us live longer, you know, more fulfilled lives. When the pandemic head I found myself living alone in Washington, DC in a small kind of 425 square foot apartment. And even though I had family and friends geographically close by, I was immediately just like many of you on the call likely kind of shut shut off from those connections and relationships. I at the time, I was working in healthcare technology, and all of my work, my travel had stopped, all of my kind of relationships with different clients and partners had stopped. And I was feeling this intense emotion, of loneliness, and isolation. And it's feeling that I had felt through transitions before, I know, you talked a little bit about moments of transition, going off to college for the first time or moving out of the house, or other things like that. But this is really one of the times where I thought not only that loneliness, but also that real isolation. And so I sought out a organization that was working on this topic. My great colleague, Eddie Garcia founded the foundation in 2020, which was perfect timing in terms of just this was the time that we needed to come together to work on these issues. A little bit of silver lining of the pandemic was just that it shine a light on the work. And on these issues that had been growing much, you know, longer before the pandemic even happened, people have been experiencing feelings of isolation and loneliness for decades. And so I was so thrilled to be able to join this organization and then to grow it and and really in partnership with all the incredible individuals that are doing this work on the ground day in and day out across the nation. I love that.

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

Thank you for sharing a little bit of that, of that personal connection. We've learned and heard increasingly about the Surgeon General's call for social connection. And he's pointed at the real health, detriments of social isolation and loneliness. And wondering if you could ground us a little bit in that research that and the talking points he's had for us. And just like, what are some basic definitions for social isolation versus loneliness? versus social health? That's another term we've heard a lot these days. And, and how is your work connected to the work of a Surgeon General?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Absolutely, thank you. And, you know, just to take one step back, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is to advance social connection nationwide rooted in evidence to improve our collective well being. So we work really closely with our scientific leadership council, as well as our larger scientific network, to make sure that we're bringing the evidence into how we're delivering, you know, models of social connection interventions around social connection, and working with different leaders across the country so that we can implement best practices. And really, we're working towards a vision of creating a vibrant society, where social connection is at the heart of where we live, and how we live. And so we were so pleased that the Surgeon General and his team are interested and committed to working on this topic over the last couple years. And of course, we were thrilled to to be contributors to the advisory and our scientific chair, Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad was the lead scientific editor of the advisory that came out last year. And I'm so glad that you're asking me about the definitions because oftentimes, these words can kind of get completed or confused with each other. And it's important, especially as we think about developing interventions that we understand, what are we intervening on and what do we want to make sure that we're addressing and improving. So I'll start with social isolation. It's really that objective measure that count of infrequent social interactions with others, you know, infrequent engagement in different social groups. And so really thinking about when you think about your social network, does it look bear? Does it look full, that's when we're thinking about isolation. And so we want to think about maybe for an example, if you want to close your eyes and imagine it, it's, it's really the older adult or someone with who's differently abled, who might be you know, homebound or not able to leave their home and not able to engage in supports. It might be someone in rural America, who doesn't have the you know, it, whether it be broadband access, or other types of access to social infrastructure, or it might be an individual in a community that's been historically disinvested in and doesn't have, again, that local social infrastructure, clubs, groups, associations, third places for them to engage with others in. And when we think about loneliness, that's that subjective measure. So the discrepancy between the relationships that we feel like we do have, and those that we wish that we had. So, you know, you might be in a group room filled with people, you sure many of you have heard this before, but still feel lonely. If you're not feeling like you're connecting with them, you don't feel like you belong or, or are welcomed in a space with lots of people. This is where that loneliness comes in. And when we think about, you know, the youth, you may be a young LGBTQ youth in school, who doesn't feel like they can be themselves in that place of learning. That's where loneliness can come in. When we think about a new mom, I'm about to be a new mom. And so I'm thinking about, I know that there's opportunities for me to make sure that I'm not isolating or feeling that loneliness and having a community around me to support me through that effort. And, and through that experience. And then as we think about social connection, which is really an overarching term, thinking about the structure, quality and function of our relationships, having many or a variety of social relationships that are high quality, and that we can rely on. So again, really that structure piece thinking about the objective count, thinking about function, what are our relationships serving, you know, how are we supporting others, whether it be mentorship, volunteering, some sort of peer support, and then that quality or these positive interactions that we're having with people?

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

Yeah, that is so helpful. I don't know that I've heard you actually walk through those three definitions before. I'm wondering why I haven't asked you that before. But it's really clear, I love that the measurable, the more subjective, objective, subjective, and then the structure or quality and function of relationships. It does make me think about how when I think back to high school, and the ways in which I felt, I'd actually say now I was lonely, not socially isolated. And in fact, it was the fact that I was surrounded by people that did not feel like I belonged. That exacerbated the delta between what I longed for and what I felt I had super helpful. And the fact that I had a strong faith community was the social connection or the structure that provide a quality and diversity of relationships. Even though it was really mostly on the weekends, it was still there. And it was very reliable. If I could make it to the weekend. I knew I'd be okay, so, super helpful framing. I'm wondering if we could talk a little bit about why olders and youngers are the most isolated and or lonely groups in America. Why is it? How does social isolation and loneliness show up maybe a little differently for those two bookend generations? And where are their similarities? And how might we therefore find some connection points and solving two problems with one solution?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Yeah, thanks so much for the question. I will say, just going back a little bit to the advisory, and just the trends that we're seeing, you know, across all ages, we're seeing increased trends of isolation and loneliness. And this was happening prior to the pandemic, and continued and was exasperated by that. We know that more people are living alone. We know people are less involved in community groups, there's religious affiliation, and we're spending less time with our family and friends. You know, to just quick data points I'll pull out from the advisory since 20, oh, sprint since 2003, excuse me. We're spending time with people our time spent with people has decreased 10 hours per month. And the amount of time we're spending isolated from others has increased 24 hours a month. And so even just thinking about like, that's from American time, survey time that we're spending with others is decreasing. We're spending a lot of time alone. We're spending a lot of time on our phones and other other devices. It is right. And there are cultural drivers that are kind of driving us into spaces are experiences of chronic isolation and loneliness like hyper individualism. I mentioned kind of religious affiliation, this focus on speed and efficiency and mobility, and our focus on privatization versus communal resources, shared spaces, etc. When we think about that kind of U shape, right, and you mentioned, people are experiencing loneliness, at younger ages, and then at older ages, we think about again, back to those transition times. So we know that young adults and Gen Z in particular reported really high rates of loneliness, I think 79% reported lonely. Now, I want to just take one pause and say, not all loneliness is bad, right? We know that stress to the body causes us to make changes, we see, you know, we're in a stressful environment, there's a car coming out as we move, right, we know that there's some some positive to having some experience where we need to change what's happening in our life. But the chronic experience and condition of loneliness and social isolation, this is where we get really concerned because it has impacts on our physical, mental health, or economic health, etc. And so that's really what we're looking out for about we're making sure that we're talking about here and wanting to intervene on when we talk about again, there's like transitions for youth and young adults moving away from, you know, into college, maybe away from their parents, we know that they're spending more time in social media, and that has led to some feelings, especially in terms of anxiety, and increased levels of depression, which can be indicators for loneliness and or isolation. With older adults, we know that there's also more life transitions in terms of, you know, leaving a job, maybe losing a spouse. You know, we understand that there are just different changes that are happening with me, perhaps living alone in older age, the chronic illness or mobility issues that are removing you from society. And so while these experiences of loneliness and isolation could happen across the lifespan, we know that there are these two areas, kind of at the youngest in the older populations that are experiencing it most. I will say that, of course, this leads us and brings us to great opportunity for these for these generations to come together to work on those solutions to work on evidence based and evidence informed interventions to kind of turn that around, right, you move to the upswing, instead of having this heightened experiences, maybe thinking about it more, as you know, spurts of loneliness throughout life, but then moving towards increased social connection as well. Yeah,

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

that's really helpful. And we of course, already have a barrage of questions coming in. And I might even one here because it's, it fits well here. One of our participants has, has mentioned that you've talked about evidence based science that's used to implement best practices in this area. What are some of those price Best Practices you've seen to address loneliness and isolation? And then I'll layer on this double question of Have you seen any promising or scalable solutions that actually are what we would call cogenerational, where older and younger are coming together to either solve each other's isolation, loneliness, or working together to solve a community's isolation and loneliness?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Great questions. So I'll talk about a couple of things. And I'll try to be organized in my response. But just taking a public health lens and approach we like to think about P S, E. So policies, systems and environment. And when we think about sustainable change, we like to think about policy systems and environmental changes, so that we're not just thinking about like a point in time program, or the groups getting together one time or we're having a, you know, a community garden, and then we're having a county fair, and then nothing again, right, we really want to think about how do we embed these practices into a community. There has been some research great research on sort of the individual and interpersonal level, where we think about the need for more data and evaluation studies is that as we get out to the kind of the community or organization or society further out on the socio ecological model, we need a little bit more research on kind of what's working best, but we do have some great promising practices and strategies that we've seen work well. And we released at the foundation, our action guide for building socially connected communities last year, which is a six step process for kind of how to learn about social connection in your own community and then to implement best practices. related to what your community needs, you're the expert of your own community. And so I'm happy to share a link to the action guide. But through that, we did a lot of conversations across the country, one in particular that we loved within Minneapolis and Hennepin County, where we had high school students, and, you know, teachers, educators, older adults, we also had mayors of different towns in the region come together to talk about the community needs and talk about social connection, really work on prototyping together. So I'll just talk about when we said P, S, E, I'm going to go to E for Super environment, one of the major things that I know that you've talked about this a lot in your work, and your team is building intergenerational communities, right, intentional communities where we're bringing different generations together. So we know examples like that, of that are generations of Hope communities, you know, Judson Manor, which is a retirement community in Cleveland, which has kind of free housing for students that are in music programs in the area. And for, you know, kind of an exchange for free housing, they often play concerts for the older adults that are living in the community, and they have opportunities for engagement, social engagement, etc. And in our built environment report that we just released a couple months ago, and we'll make sure to share that as well. We have a lot of information on how to design for kind of community connection, how to make sure we're thinking about universal design so that different differently abled individuals, people across different generations can come to a place feel like they belong, feel like they can activate a space. And so when we think about the E environment, one of the main strategies I would I would support is, of course, building those intentional intergenerational communities. The second would be as we think about systems, is volunteer programs or volunteer systems. Again, I know that you are, you know, no stranger to these programs. And I know we also had the Americas, your team speaking on one of your your webinars previously, you know, examples include experience score, I think I saw David on here, and the great work that they're doing at AARP. You know, thinking about Detroit and the genuine connections program, I think I saw Greg on here and give five they're working on a new program where they're bringing young people, adult young adults and older adults together to actually solve a problem that they're facing in their community misinformation. And we actually launched a program in Houston last year called pals, which is a volunteer program between students, mostly medical, professional students and older adults living in nursing homes, and how could we help with kind of positive perceptions of aging for the students and even encouraging them to get into field of geriatrics while also supporting older adults living in nursing homes with their experience of social isolation and loneliness. So as you think about systems, volunteer programs is a great strategy. Lastly, I'll just talk about policies. So we're kind of going backwards with our PSC approaches. But this goes back a little bit to the first one is we talk about building intentional communities, intergenerational communities, this is talking about zoning laws. And so reforming zoning laws so that we're building more kind of shared or mixed use walkable neighborhoods, which will reduce barriers for you know, mobility challenges, will create opportunities for different people in the community and in the neighborhood to connect with each other. And, you know, I think there's just a lot of opportunity. These are just three kinds of examples across policy systems environment, but we have a lot of examples within the action guide, and our wonderful partners that are, are leading these programs across the country. But I would think about how can we think about sustainable programs that are addressing? You know, going back to kind of the definition is that loneliness is a social isolation, do we want to make sure that we're increasing people's time spent with others? And that we're increasing their relationships with others? Or and how are we thinking about how we want to help people as individual feelings of loneliness, and talk to them about belonging in a community and what would help them feel that belonging and making sure that we're offering opportunities for that as well.

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

This is another reminder why I love talking to you, Julian, because you're so good at organizing incredible amounts of data. This is what The Foundation for Social Connection does. And why I appreciate the research backing and the way you put things in framework. So okay, this is helpful too. Let's, let's dig in there. I like the PE S framework. And that you did it backwards because I think it's also more accessible for us to start with some of the environmental pieces. When we think about environment housing in the kind of where we, where we live. Here at CoGenerate. We have an initiative also called Campus CoGenerate, where we're thinking about the role college campuses can play. That's a place where people spend time and older adults are increasingly also being drawn onto college campuses for variety of reasons. There's a rise in university based retirement communities where older adults are actually living in what feels like campus housing. But for older folks, I think that gets at both the the environmental proximity piece. But it also gets at the thing you mentioned earlier, when you said, we have to look at structures and quality and diversity of relationships. Imagine a college campus where maybe you can find a lot of activity as a young person and get engaged in clubs. But the variety of relationships you have would be dramatically increased if the included people with different networks who were older, recently retired, have a different kind of time on their hands, and are looking to connect and learn at a different stage of life. So that is really helpful. I'm wondering if we could talk for a second about the second part, the systems piece and your emphasis on volunteer programs. That is an area we care a lot about, we see so much opportunity, we think, volunteerism national service. These are huge levers for intergenerational connection while making a difference in the community. Can you talk a little bit about the role purpose plays in social connection and belonging? Because I think when we talk about volunteers, and what I've seen in my career is, it's not just about getting a job done. It's that when an older and a younger person come together, they build strong relationships and feel a sense of purpose, that purpose as some secret sauce to this. I don't know if there's scientific backing on it. But maybe you could wax out about that a little.

**Jillian Racoosin**

Yeah, absolutely. I'm really glad that you brought that up. You know, we worked last year with our friends at UnitedHealthcare, and AARP specifically on their key doh programs and some of the research that they were doing on personal determinants of health. So, perhaps that the audience has heard of SDOH social determinants of health. And we like to think of social connection as a social determinants of health, right? These are the things that outside of just kind of our medical care, we're thinking about housing or economic prosperity, social connections, etc, that help us holistically be healthy, and have positive well being. And as we think about the PDU, age, personal determinants of health, one of the key indicators and key what is Dr. Yang, I like to call it I think what the legs of the bench or legs of the stool, I should say, is purpose because it is a huge piece of what you know, these individuals to feel that, you know, overwhelming again, while being Nassif, that's a word that, you know, the drive to want to continue to serve, not only others, their community, etc, and also feel valued in a community and feel like they have a place in community. We work within an organization in Maine who does some some great work with youth in schools, and they like to talk about it as youth mattering. You know, do you feel like you matter to your school? Do you feel like you matter? Do you feel that you have a place here? And a lot of that comes back to what opportunities are you giving individuals, people, youth, people of all ages to contribute right to that place, and to be a part of what makes it beautiful, or what makes it prosper? So I think purpose is a huge, huge piece of it. I think it allows people to feel some autonomy and and power over the outcome. And so I am really glad that you brought that up. And I think it's also talks about kind of the bi directional benefit of these volunteer programs, right? Because it's not only a volunteer, excuse me, not only a benefit to people you're serving, but also a huge benefit to the people who are serving and allows them to build up purpose and also build belonging and social connection within themselves. Yeah,

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

it also makes me think about under the systems piece, in addition to volunteer programs, that faith institutions play a huge role there. Because of the centering of purpose. We're actually going to be launching a little bit later this this fall, the summer and fall and initiative around cogenerational solutions that are happening in faith based settings. Have you seen anything exciting or interesting happening there? It's a place where older adults are still very present and depending on the community, young people, I think if you could center purpose and community good moral withdrawal more young people in but would love to hear any thoughts on that? Yeah,

**Jillian Racoosin**

I mean, I absolutely I absolutely think that we need faith communities to be at the table with us and faith leaders. We worked When we were building the action guide with a couple of different communities across the country, one of them being San Antonio, and we worked closely with an home key, who is the faith liaison to the city of San Antonio, she works directly with the mayor on all the programs that you know helped to make the city run properly and to make it a great place to live. And so it was wonderful to have her really leading a group of different local leaders that are of all ages come to the table. She also had her daughter with her at the convening wanted to make sure we had different generations and different perspectives. And so I absolutely think that it's an important piece of it. We're working now again, with a organization called SeaTac. And they're they're looking at a program in Louisville, Kentucky, where they're training community leaders. And that could be faith leaders, it could be artists in the community, it could be others in the community that have sort of that buy in that the stakeholders support, and where they can actually be supporting people with their social connections, maybe kind of a community connector of sorts. And so I do you think that it's a great opportunity for faith leaders to bring in, you know, different generations into space together? I think one thing I'll just call out is making sure that we're thinking about how to make places of faith welcoming to all to all people. And so that's something that we we're continuing to just make sure that we're double clicking on so that people feel safe and welcoming in all places of worship. Yeah,

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

that's really helpful and makes me think about once again, that went earlier, when you talked about the paying attention, the structure of having diverse types of relationships. And I think once again, faith institutions can pay attention to how they are welcoming for the community around them. And if you walk in and see people like you, what does that How might that actually improve, improve the stickiness across generations of connection? All right, I want to do a little bit of a deeper dive into that last one, you talked about policies, that's not an area that CoGenerate tends to work directly in as much but we do dabble there around big ideas. And and I think personally, I've experienced the ways in which policies, in really small, tangible ways prevent social connection. One area where I've experienced that the most is when an organization like maybe like a Parks and Rec or something like that is trying to create an intergenerational program that brings older and younger people together, they already have senior programming, and maybe they have kid programming, but they might have a pot of funding that is meant only for seniors or only for young people. And then something as simple as having a potluck, or having food and other things that cost them money gets complicated because the policies are themselves H siloed. Have you seen any like what you mentioned, zoning, do you have a sense for where the biggest levers are on policy that can break down the silos that impact our lives in ways that we aren't even aware of until we start to try and innovate and do creative things in this area?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Great question. So I'll talk about this big P and small p policy. So small p, definitely easier to leverage and think how we can kind of shift a little bit more. And when I say small, pay me more at the organizational level? And how can we think about, you know, streamlining funding or, you know, looking at, you know, programs, the outcomes versus the siloing of kind of the different age groups or audiences or individuals that they're reaching, really thinking about? What are the outcomes and those being our pillars that we want to impact? And how can we make sure that we're contributing funding towards that, and then letting you know, the the program's themselves or the systems themselves trickle down from there. As we think about kind of the big policy, you know, the reality of, of some of the agency world is that we have departments, right. And so the Administration for Community Living, which really focuses on older adults and those with disabilities, they supply or, you know, have federal funding go down to the triple A's area agencies on aging, and some of it is kind of specific about what they can use funds for, and how they can make sure they're supporting older adults living in community. We also have, you know, the Department for Children and Families who don't do a lot of great work or even the CDC is doing great work in schools, and healthy family life and things like that and social connection in that way. And so something we've been trying to do is bring a lot of these agency partners together, and we know that there are people in in government as well that are working on this. And so we held our second annual kind of funders or land therapy and public agency partner gathering Just last month, where we were making sure we were bringing all these different players to the table so that they could have conversations around. What are the programs that they're looking to invest in? How could we maybe think about working across different partnerships so that we can create bigger impact. The last thing I'll just mention is we had our global loneliness Awareness Week summit last month, and we had a couple of different members of Congress and Senate come to speak. And as we think, again, a kind of big P policy. We had two members, specifically touch on intergenerational community and intergenerational connection. One was rep Moulton, for Massachusetts who talked specifically about resilient communities and intergenerational communities being a big piece of that. And so we're hoping and expecting that there's some introduction of a bill from rep. Moulton soon around this topic that includes specifically intergenerational community. And the second is Senator Halston. She has been outspoken about making an amendment to the Older Americans Act that would specifically add funds or add, you know, some some specific direction and strategic thinking towards intergenerational work, you know, as a part of the Older Americans Act, reauthorization, and so we are seeing it more now than ever being talked about on kind of the highest levels of government and with our federal legislators. And so that to us is really exciting. And we want to make sure that we're continuing the conversation and bringing it bringing it to the forefront.

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

Those are great, great points to add into the conversation. It I think there's so many so many rabbit holes, we could go down here, I think what I want to do is, is to jump into some q&a, so we can make sure we answer some of our guests questions, and there are many of them. So I think I'll start with this one about housing. But I want to frame it maybe a little broader than that. So the question is, is it better not to have 55 and older housing, but instead multi generational housing communities? I think a broader version of that question that we think quite a lot about is, there is a way in which we feel more connected when we are more with people who are exactly like us. And then you have that point about, but the diversity of connections actually deepens the quality. When it comes to building structural things like housing or other or you know, who we go to school with, or what clubs we join, for example, are there ways for us to think about when we leverage the strength of same, versus when we leverage the strength of different and obviously, in this case, this conversation, the differences that we think the most about is across generations?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Great question. You know, I think largely, everyone, I hope would or would probably agree that another cultural contributor to disconnection is toxic polarization, right and kind of us continuing to be in our tribes and not bridging across difference. So I think it's critically important that we are encouraging opportunities to, to do both, but to make sure that there are opportunities for people to learn from one another, and learn from someone who might look present themselves as different, who might come from a different background who might be a different age from them. So I think it's a both and I think investing in housing for 55. Plus, absolutely. I also think investing in opportunities for multi generational households. I think that there is so much benefit that could come from living in a multi generational household or in a community of different generations. And so, I would say it's a both and, and the working and bridging across difference for me, and my belief is that it has never been more important. So that's what I would say on that.

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

I did not too long ago, a site visit of Mirabella the university based retirement community based on that Arizona State University campus. And when we were having a sort of a focus group conversation with some of the older residents there, we said, wow, would you given your living on campus in this retirement community? Would you be interested in pushing it one step further, where you were actually living cogenerationally with some of the students and a couple of the residents there said no, actually they love having a place to go home to that is, is more peer based. But having regular intentional daily touchpoints with the young people is perfect. So in the end preference, but we need more variety and options.

**Jillian Racoosin**

Absolutely. And I think it goes back also to the learnings on both sides. A positive perceptions of aging. We talked about ageism, you know, we want to make sure we're allowing young people and an older adults, people of different generations to be able to learn from one another. And make sure that we're including those voices at the table when we're also trying to solve for for those, you know, for those different generations in the challenges they face.

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

Absolutely. I want to switch over to measures and measurement and evaluation for a second because of your science grounding, which I really appreciate. Sometimes social isolation and loneliness, topics like this can be put in this kind of soft, fuzzy, nice or I don't know, it's, it's a nice to have not necessary. So both the Surgeon General's work and yours have brought some teeth to it. Arielle Galinsky who is a Senior Fellow with us as a question. She's also the founder of Legacy Project, a campus based intergenerational project. She wants to know if you found any best practices for how to measure the impact of social isolation and loneliness in terms of proving that your solution works. And I think if I channel Arielle, really for programs that may not have national budgets, right, and there's so many awesome community programs, college based programs and others with limited resources, how can we be thinking about measurements in a way that supports the whole?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Thank you for the question Arielle. And I'll say a couple of things. One, measurement is so key and important. And that is a large topic of conversation, and the research role in the practitioner role, you know, across the board as relates to social connection, one of the challenges we face as a field right now is that we don't have standardized measurement, you know, for these conditions. We also don't have national surveillance, in 2022 is the first year that one of the government national surveys asked about social support and perceived social isolation, we're just getting some of that data. Now, you know, we have it on the state level, we want to get it down more to a localized level, make sure that we're able to kind of utilize this information, not only once in 22, but to be able to continue to serve to survey individuals so that we have an understanding of what's working and how are trends moving. What we do have is a couple things. One is on our website, and I'll just plug it we have a measurement inventory. So it basically allows you to see across different outcomes of interest, whether it be social isolation, loneliness, etc. Um, different options for tools, validated measures and tools and survey tools, it links you right to it. So it should have all the information you need there. We also have opportunities to engage with our team and our scientific leadership council if you have a specific project that you're interested in working with us on and, and this is a lot of what we do is we work with different organizations who want our help to evaluate their interventions or their programs. The other thing that I'll mention is under our coalition, which is our sister organization, we have an older adult working group, which right now in partnership with Dr. Matthew Smith is actually testing an potentially newer adopted survey tool that is specifically looking around evaluation of social isolation and loneliness interventions. And they're doing fabulous work. So I'm happy to Ariel or anyone else is interested connect you with that group. More involvement is it's kind of leading the charge on the working group and Dr. Matthew Smith is supporting from the research side. And they're really trying to answer this question as well. What is a tool that community based organizations that smaller organizations can use that can support them in understanding? Is this working? And how do I also show it to my funders in my, you know, Grand Tours, etc, that this is creating an impact.

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

That's so helpful. I'm going to loop in a question that's a little bit more on the medical side from Shanthi, who is interested in medical research around social isolation. She says feelings of isolation or loneliness could be triggered by health challenges, including unaddressed mental health concerns. Do you? Does your evidence based science include clinical inputs?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Yeah, absolutely. Great question. Um, we have strategic way through our scientific Leadership Council nature, we have voices and perspectives from different sectors that intersect with social connection. So we have three, note two, maybe three are a little bit more on the older adult side, but three geriatricians, who are still seeing patients in doing clinical work and we have now two pediatricians that are working with us for kind of thinking about how do we bring in that scientific evidence? We have a lot of psychology experts. We have experts in housing and education. etc, that are making sure that we're contributing to, to the field in an accurate way. I will also say that, you know, as it relates to some of the Depression scales that we know have been used in clinical settings, and anxiety measures, we know that these are outcomes that are interesting as relates to how they might be leading towards feelings of chronic isolation and loneliness, or even how feelings of isolation and loneliness might be contributing towards, you know, mental health, distress, anxiety, depression, etc. So those are absolutely, you know, indicators and outcomes that we're interested in exploring, and we bring those into our work. But if there's other ways that you would suggest we do that with love, we love feedback. So please feel free to reach out to us. I'm

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

wondering if we could spend a little time on talked a little bit about older adults and loneliness and isolation. And we'll get focused on young people for a second in some cogenerational ways of of, of supporting that. Byron camp says he has an interest in loneliness in young men. He says, I recognize the issue of loneliness within our senior community. However, what are your thoughts related to the male population between the ages of 16 to 28, who may not have social interaction, who may have social not have social interactions, and the ways in which that may contribute to mental health issues? Suicide rates in young people has been growing? What? What are your thoughts on ways that we can in particular caretake for the younger generations? And have you seen any solutions where older adults are playing a role?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Yeah, so I think a couple of things I'll mention, you know, firstly, Gen Z, youth, young adults are experiencing high rates of loneliness, we've talked about this, the research is showing us that we understand that there are kind of in this new, digitally digital first world, just different things and ways that we're young people are growing up in the world, and needing to sort of understand how they fit in with virtual connection in person connection, you know, how to kind of maintain bonds with people, how to find a place where when identity has become a little bit more questions, more questions around identity, and we're talking about it more in society, how can make people make sure that they have that feeling of belonging? And how can we, you know, help other people feel like they belong in place and in space. So we worked teamed up with a couple of different organizations over the last couple years, because we knew that this was a specific segment of the population that was experiencing this, you know, experiencing it much more. One is our work with young futures, which I think, you know, we've talked about Eunice, but the the young futures team, they committed $1 million dollars investing in 10 different nonprofit organizations that are specifically working on teens, and how teens can be more socially connected in this digital first world. And so we were so thrilled to be able to work with the different cohort members to see all the different applications come through. And a couple of those have some intergenerational components. I know we talked a little bit about the the Sesame 3G group that's doing some great work across different generations around you know, love for Sesame and the content around that. And also the be loud group, which is doing some great work, educating young people on how to use their voice through radio, through other means of digital media, to make sure that they're showing up in space, and that they're able to have self expression. I also love the group, this teenage life, which has a teen podcast that they put out, they also do different cartooning and drawing as a way to have again, self expression, but to make sure that they're bringing voices from not only across the country, but across the globe, to talk about what is it like to be a teenager today, because a lot of times we think about our own experience, but things are very different. Now, some things are very much the same. But sometimes we also need to be reminded about, you know, this is their experience, and they should be able to share it and help us think about what those solutions might be to any of the challenges they're facing. I will also mention there the research shows that men and women especially this is I guess 18 Plus experience the have a bit of an equal experience in terms of the amount of isolation loneliness, it's not that one is experiencing more than the other. It shows that there are some differences in the way they experience loneliness and social isolation. We you You know, have some data showing that it's a little bit harder for, for men to engage socially in their community, we understand that there have been some links to, you know, gun violence as it relates to chronically lonely young men, especially kind of in that 18 to 22 range. And so we are looking a little bit more deeply at kind of the segments of the population that have not really been engaged with the the unfortunate thing about this issue is that there are many different segments of the population who are experiencing this, that we want to make sure that we're tailoring interventions specifically towards their needs. I talked about new moms, veterans, and LGBTQ population, and young man is is another piece of that. And so how do we make sure as we're kind of developing interventions, we're looking at the evidence, we're also including those that were trying to serve at the table in our intervention design, and then continuing to collect data so that we can know what's working. Yeah,

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

I feel like so many of the populations you've mentioned, it's like we're looking at social social isolation and loneliness has, has a ready solution. And the solution is other humans, right? I didn't see the chat, somebody mentioned that animals, pets are a really good connector across generations too. So I'm not discounting that I think we should, we should utilize pets as well as our friends and companions. But there is a really ready human solution. And we have record numbers for the first time in our country of older and younger people. In fact, it's the first time that our world has had equal numbers of people who are like seven and 70. It's just it's an unprecedented shape of, of our demographics. And I often think of it as it also means for the first time, if we just matched people up, we would have the right numbers across generations. And I think that if I'm that really heartening, I'm gonna see if I can squeeze in two final questions here. Because we, I have 15 in my head, but I'd love to have one as you think about the different types of sub segments and how they experience loneliness and isolation. Have you seen any differences in cultural background?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think, you know, again, historically, marginalized communities by poor communities are experiencing isolation at higher rates. We also know, in we've been working with specific communities who are recently coming to America, right immigrants and migrant communities, who they want to feel welcomed in their space, they have a lot of fear, you know, of course, coming into a new place as anyone would. And so we've, over the last year been working with a wonderful group of Afghan women, refugees across the country and different programs that they are deploying, really based on what their community needs and wants. And sometimes it might be, you know, a swimming club, where they're going to shut down the pool. So they all feel safe going into the pool and building that feels comfortable to them. Or it might be that they have a sewing club or cooking class. And so really, again, welcoming those communities to the table as we're developing those interventions, understanding their experience and the narratives that they're sharing what they bring, and then kind of moving forward and how we can best serve them. That absolutely, I think we're seeing, you know, different cultures come again, with different experiences. I think, as we think about, again, that isolation piece, that's really where we want to get back to that objective count of what can we do to actually eliminate those barriers of relationship building. And maybe that's investing in local social infrastructure. So again, investing in like, community centers and community ways where people can gather safely, or that they feel welcome. And so just going back to some of the strategies I mentioned earlier, but short answer to your question is yes, we are seeing some differences. And again, it goes back to sort of tailoring solutions to interventions to those you're looking to serve.

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

Yeah I'm gonna throw in one more: demographics, because it's close to my home, which is the loneliness that, that movement leaders and organizational leaders, especially in the social social sector, say that they feel all the time under duress and not enough resourcing a holding up big burdens on their own. I'm going to make a shameless plug for cogenerational co leadership, because this work is all too big to do alone. And we need teams that have the diversity of generational viewpoints and resilience built in. I'm going to ask you, just your quick answer to given the enormity of this and that impacts literally, everybody. What gives you hope these days When you do this work?

**Jillian Racoosin**

Great question. I mean, you give me hope, Eunice and the work that CoGenerate is doing, I will say, and I think even the cohort they know you're you're going to announce to talk about these are the data points, we need right to continue making the case to continue to showing what's working. The hundreds of people on this call are giving me hope, because there's so much interest people are paying attention. The time is now we've been going in a downward in this trend in terms of time we're spending together the disconnection we're feeling globally. It's ready, as Dr. Putnam says, For the upswing, we're ready to turn it around. People are paying attention the time is now. I think the time is now in community, we're also seeing our federal legislators or state legislators coming to the table ready, understanding that this has been a real issue. And it's impacting not only, you know, communities, you know, their physical health, their mental health, their social health, economic prosperity is such a big piece in terms of social capital, there are so many outcomes. So when we talk about our vision is for social connection to be at the center of how we live, we really need that. And so, you know, what gives me hope is just all the great people on this network that are ready to serve and ready to act.

**Eunice Lin Nichols**

I love that. I often say if there's one field of work that should not be and cannot be done alone, it's the one addressing social isolation and loneliness. So I appreciate that as your final word, I want to say something that I'm grateful for is philanthropy. Small but mighty. There are a few funders that are really after supporting cogenerational approaches to these issues, including social isolation and loneliness. So I want to thank our EF foundation for aging. Aires Charitable Foundation, Eisner Foundation, made this work and this kind of webinar possible for us. I'm gonna close out with a couple of quick announcements. One, stay tuned. For more webinars like this one, we're going to continue the conversation on the power cogenerational solutions to social isolation and loneliness with other experts like Julian authors, practitioners, researchers, innovators, and creatives. If we have more time, I'd love to talk about creative arts and culture and its role in this space. But we'll get to that in future webinars. And today, we're really excited to announce a special innovators Community of Practice. It's a free five week learning experience for innovators and disruptors who are interested in adopting or scaling cogenerational strategies to reduce social isolation, loneliness, all the things we've been talking about today, if that's your jam, and you love working on that at the community level at the organizational level, and you have a heart to move that forward, we hope you'll consider joining us in this community at practice. We'll talk about everything from how to shift the mentality of younger or olders as victims or service recipients to being agents of change. We're going to talk about how we moved from tokenism of having a couple olders. And a couple younger years involved to power sharing, we're going to talk about how to move from generational conflict to collaboration. So you don't want to miss that applications open today. So go to our website, and there'll be a link in our chat box. And we're going to have an info session on more. So if you have questions, please come to the info session on August 15. It'll be recorded, we'll get it to you. And we also want to make sure you have a second to answer a quick poll that Duncan is going to put here. Because we like to learn whether or not our content is making a difference for you. So we're in learning mode too. And as you answer that, I'll say last but not least, we will be publishing a research study later this year that showcases cogenerational solutions. And that makes the case for why one of the most promising, though unsung ways to reduce social isolation and loneliness is by strengthening older and younger connections across our communities. So there's so much more that's happening here. We are so grateful for you spending an hour of your time with us. Thank you, Jillian, for your tireless work and your energy, enthusiasm, mutual inspiration. I look forward to more collaborations with you and your team. Please, everybody stay in touch and have a great day. Go out and connect with somebody.